WHEN THE WORLD BLACKS OUT
by
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When the World Blacks Out

by MARGARET MURPHY

SEVENTY-FOUR Americans will go blind today. If you have dared to live for two or three minutes without your eyes (and if you haven't drowned or gone up in smoke!) you now know what their greatest loss will be.

A blind person's greatest suffering is not that he will never again see a rose or look into the face of a loved one. This is what the sentimentalists have insisted, but the blind know differently. There is nothing sentimental about the frustrating and humiliating handicap of not being able to see. Crossing the smallest room becomes as hazardous as scaling Everest. Heating a can of soup requires as much preparation as constructing an atomic bomb. And telling a good story is frankly embarrassing; it's too much like talking to yourself.

Most blind adults were not blind as children. Like you they were accustomed to their eyes. Then suddenly, or perhaps gradually, they could no longer depend on their sight. They became clumsy, confused, "groping in the dark." Unlike you, they cannot restore their sight at will. They must become used to this lightless, unreadable void which separates all blind people from the world in which they live, a world made for sighted people.

DESPITE the fact that there are 314,000 blind persons, including 30,000 under twenty years of age, in this country today for whom the public and private agencies spend $150,000,000 annually, very little has been done to help the sightless person regain this "mobility," the professional term for the ability to move about freely, to cross a room and pour a glass of water or to bring a match and cigarette together without setting eyebrows or neckties aflame.

What has been done has been almost entirely under the auspices of the medical services of the armed forces or the Veterans Administration. The first person to try to bring together all the various types of professional workers for the blind, in order to work out a plan for the scientific teaching of mobility restoration for civilians, was the energetic director of the Catholic Guild

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Before reading this article, the author suggests that, with your eyes tightly closed, you try lighting a cigarette or pouring yourself a glass of water. Your ignominious failure to perform these commonplace acts will give you a right appreciation of what the newly-blinded face daily, and of how necessary is the training provided at Saint Paul's Rehabilitation Center for the Blind at Newton, Mass. Margaret Murphy, B.A., a graduate of Manhattanville College of the Sacred Heart, is a free-lance writer and a Director of Publicity at Newton College.

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This is striking at the very roots of the problem.

However all this will be of little avail if the Government refuses to give full approval to the well planned programs of the Indians. Unfortunately it is the Department of the Interior which has the final say on Indian affairs, and unfortunately likewise, this department's main concern for the time being is an immediate reduction of domestic spending. It would like nothing better than to drop all protection for the Indian, and get out of the whole Indian business at once.

Therefore it is up to us voters to give our whole-hearted support to the program of Commissioner Emmons and the Indian tribes of the United States. They need our help to make a real success of their reservations—to develop their land and resources, to bring in industry, and to promote better health and educational facilities for their people.

As the economic base of the reservation is thereby raised and strengthened, the tribe itself, under the direction of its duly elected Tribal Council, can incorporate and take over the authority and responsibilities of the Bureau. With this opportunity for self-expression and activity, leaders will rise from within the tribe who will organize and direct its efforts and aspirations.

As the Government yields the authority by which it has substituted for the Indian's disabilities, that authority will be shouldered by the Indian himself. His community will emerge as an organized Indian society with civil, political, and social institutions impregnated with his own Indian culture. In time, each tribal reservation can gradually take its place within the whole strata of local, state, and national societies within the United States. The tribe will be but one more group working, in its own way, toward the common good of the whole body politic.

In this way, the Indian can maintain his identity and his tribal status. He can preserve his whole social and cultural inheritance as a basis for strength and unity in his family and community life. His will be a subculture within the larger American culture, and his reservation a homeland within the larger American homeland. His communal mode of life will gradually give way to individual ownership and self-dependence; his habit of living will be changed as he adopts more of the conveniences of modern civilization and undertakes its responsibilities.

Nonetheless, the Indian will retain his Indian outlook—his affection for his family and relations, his generosity, his strong sense of democracy and equality, and his love of the earth and all it brings forth. He will retain his amazing ability to adapt the products of nature to the daily needs of the people. Once again, from a re-vitalized people, workers and artists will arise to express their thoughts and feelings in answer to modern needs and problems.

As Commissioner Emmons points out very definitely in his meetings with reservation representatives, Indian workers prove to be of the very best if they are given an honest chance to show their worth. Such an opportunity will enable the Indian to take the same pride in his future that he has in his past, and that is all he needs in order to survive and to be happy.

for the Blind in Boston, the Rev. Thomas J. Carroll. Under Father Carroll's direction the first conference for these experts was held at the Carroll family home near Boston in late 1953.

Although it is still too early to judge the full effects of this conference it could prove to be the most significant meeting of our generation to the hundreds of thousands of sightless Americans, including the potentially blind such as the estimated 800,000 victims of glaucoma who do not suspect they have this blinding disease, and who won't know until they have lost a noticeable and unrestorable part of their vision.

But probably more important to the newly blinded housewife, judge, factory worker, student, bank clerk or taxicab driver were Father Carroll's efforts in establishing St. Paul's Rehabilitation Center in suburban Newton. The first of its kind in New England, it was opened last year as a practical immediate answer to the urgent problems they faced daily.

Unlike the residence schools for blind children, such as Perkins Institution in adjoining Watertown, St. Paul's concentrates on training adults. In a reddish stone barn built to house first the horses and later the limousines of a Boston merchant, Father Carroll saw the possibilities of a comfortable residence-classroom building for ten newly blinded persons.

The Guild owned the property and Father knew that there were hundreds of potential students in the six-state area the Center would serve. He also knew the answer to their fumbling lack of orientation. What he didn't have was money. The Guild's budget, supported almost entirely by the annual "Odd Change Harvest" conducted every Fall, was stretched thin to cover its service program to Massachusetts' 7,000 blind, including the bimonthly *Listen,* the only newspaper for the blind in the state and the first of its kind in the country. Money was needed for a professional staff and to equip the barn with the basic fixtures, furniture, training devices and other material needed to make St. Paul's program "work."

A telephone call to the Daughters of Charity in South Boston brought Father an offer of "anything that was nailed down" in the eighty-year-old Carney Hospital building which was being razed as the Sisters prepared to move to a new multi-million dollar "New Carney" on another site.

Led by Father Carroll's assistant, social worker Robert Dole, a group of volunteers, including "week-end warriors" from Dole's Marine Reserve unit and several off-duty Army engineers, stripped the building of nearly new fluorescent lighting fixtures, a thousand feet of radiation, a length of fire escape steps, toilet fixtures, enough equipment to put the old barn into livable, though not luxurious, shape. The last whisp of straw was cleaned out of the hayloft and a dormitory for seven men was set up. Downstairs, a high-ceilinged section was partitioned off into a room for three women. Offices were set up for the director, the mobility experts, social worker, doctors, psychologist, and other staff members.

Classrooms went in where the old stalls had been. One classroom was labeled "Everyday Living." Here,

now, is a disconnected telephone; dialing a number without eyes can be an almost impossible feat, or haven't you ever had to get a number in a darkened room? There are also simple devices to help the blind person write script, such as a card with raised lines that can be placed under a sheet of paper to correct the natural tendency of a sightless writer to slant sharply up or down when attempting script writing.

There are a minimum of gadgets, hardly any that are not also used by sighted persons, such as a claw-like device widely available to help recover small articles which may fall on the floor. There is also a set of dominoes with raised instead of indented dots and a chess set in which the pawns fit into holes sunk in the board.

NEXT to this classroom is one equipped with typewriters, bought for $2.00 each from the government surplus pool. St. Paul's does not profess to be a secretarial training school. The trainees, as the newly blinded students are referred to, learn the simplest mechanics of typing, enough to give them another form of communication.

The isolation of blindness is sharpened when the sightless person is forced to express himself other than by the spoken word, one of the many factors in the problem which led Father Carroll to characterize blindness as a "multiple handicap." Learning to type helps overcome part of this handicap. But even in conversation, the blind person is at a disadvantage. He cannot judge his listener's reaction by facial expressions, posture, the things by which he had been used to judging whether or not someone was listening to him with any attention, interest or appreciation.

There are also several streamlined Braille writing machines in this classroom. Many people, including some newly blinded themselves, believe that once a person has mastered Braille or gets used to his dog, cane or other mechanical aids, he has licked the problem of breaking through that black void and reaching his own world again. Unfortunately, these *aids* are just that, auxiliary, technical helps to make it easier to reach the world. Each one by itself is only a minor, but necessary, tool; all together they are just a beginning step to the independence the blind person is trying to win back.

Every talent of the Guild's small staff is used to help the trainees win that independence. Sometimes an incongruous situation strikes a visitor to St. Paul's. In the third classroom, for example, one of Boston's most talented young artists, Robert Amendola, holds classes in "visualization." He helps the trainees make an asset out of that very much taken-for-granted ability which enables you to remember what your bedroom, your own face or the cover of this magazine look like although you cannot see it at the moment with your physical eye.

Patiently, with an understanding born of an intelligent comprehension of what blindness means, men like Amendola, men who can see, are giving the newly blinded a basic knowledge of all the tools and skills they will have to use to overcome their "multiple handicap."

SOME of the tools, like some of the talents, Father Carroll has brought into play at St. Paul's seem slightly out of place. For example, the cel-

lar of the old barn is a handy-man's vision of Paradise. Power drills, power saws, lathes, a special machine for making picture frames, more equipment than is ever seen outside hobby shows and the pages of *Popular Mechanics* are presided over by a master carpenter. Each trainee must spend a period a day in this workshop. A twenty-year old girl made a pair of lamp bases and a bird house, complete with shingled roof for which she made the half-inch shingles on another machine. Having guided a piece of soft wood through the whirling teeth of a circular saw, she should never lack confidence to use a cigarette lighter or an electric mixer.

In a solidly built lean-to on the side of the barn is the handyman's wife's dream of Paradise, a modern yellow and white kitchen with refrigerator, gas stove, lots of counter space and well-stocked cabinets overhead. All the common kitchen gadgets were incorporated into the U-shaped work area. Most of the time, three or four coffee pots are percolating on the stove and the cookie jars are bulging with brownies or ginger snaps. The only clue to the people who made this food is an over-sized cookbook on the counter, its recipes picked out in Braille. Even as the women must learn to master the power lathe, the men must spend time learning the intricacies of the pressure cooker. All this is part of Father Carroll's plan to make St. Paul's an efficient, practical stop on the blind person's way from the rocking chair to the subway train.

To maneuver the streets and crosswalks encountered between these two points, the rocking chair and the subway, takes special training. At St. Paul's the "mobility restoration experts," trained at the Guild's expense in Chicago, teach the so-called Hoover cane technique to the trainees. The familiar, and sometimes repellent, tapping white cane has been replaced by a longer, approximately chest-high, aluminum cane. But this is only the first difference the trainees encounter in learning the new method developed by Dr. Richard E. Hoover, ophthalmologist of Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. The trainees of St. Paul's use the cane as a bumper for protection and as a kind of antenna to feel out obstructions in their path. It is swung from side to side, not tapped.

The mobility restoration experts walk up and down the tree-shaded paths on the grounds and on the nearby Newton streets in order to give the trainees experience in covering different kinds of terrain. These experts know what it feels like to be on the other end of the probing cane. Although they themselves are sighted, they wore blindfolds all during their training. They know the near-panic a person without eyes experiences when going through a crowded, noise-filled down town area for the first time, alone.

The ten newly-blinded persons who will enter St. Paul's every thirteenth week will not be coddled. Instead they will be treated as normal people with a "multiple" but not morbid handicap. There is so much to be learned in the twelve weeks at the Center there is no time for orgies of self-pity on the part of the trainees or sentimental sidetracks by the staff. This "get tough" policy is tempered by the concept on which all the Guild's work was

founded, the basic dignity of each human being involved, sighted or sightless.

Many times the program will demand more of the trainees than has been traditionally expected from blind people. They'll have to be a little more independent, a little more resourceful or inventive, but none of Father Carroll's trainees will leave St. Paul's with a tin cup and a bundle of pencils. Those who cannot return to their kitchens, offices, factory benches or classrooms will find other places where they can be useful, happy members of their families and communities, able to give as much as they would have if they didn't have that one handicap—blindness.

Lesson in Geology

by M. WHITCOMB HESS

TELLING the present
By its wondrous past
(In aeon-time
On geologic clocks)
Man reads earth's poetry
At last, at last
Irrevocably written
In the rocks.

Truth's volume opens
Here on land and sea
(O boundless ocean
And such fathoms deep!)
Revealing cosmic secrets;
For its key
Is God's, is God's Who made it
Man's to keep.

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